

Recently, the journalist Fred Bernstein wrote [an opinion piece](#) in the New York Times arguing that members of Congress should not provide direct service to their constituents. He argued that constituent services helps only individuals and does not fix the system, that legislators' requests to federal agencies will be taken as threats of removing appropriations, and that members of Congress should stick to a narrow conception of legislative work.

My staff and I, who spend much if not most of our time dealing with the individual questions and problems that people bring to me, were troubled by this. In our diverse, complicated country, some people are unfairly neglected or unaware of the services or rights that are due them. People fall between the cracks. Our ingenious representative government is intended to deal with that problem by enabling their elected representatives – members of Congress – to work directly with federal agencies on their behalf.

Being a representative means much more than simply legislating in some abstract sense removed from the people of, by, and for whom the government exists. It means being the person who connects each American with his or her government. It means trying to insure that each person finds the liberty, the equality, the opportunity, and the fairness that are our goals. In short, it means helping people.

Of course, I am aware that for each person I help there are others whom I have not been able to help. Still, constituent service is my way of showing that government cares about you, regardless of your station in life. It is a way of beating back the cynicism about our ability to govern ourselves. Constituent services are an essential part of realizing the genius of the Philadelphia constitutional experiment in self-government.

The New York Times printed a somewhat abbreviated version of my argument to this effect in a recent [letter to the editor](#).

Since the beginning of last year, I have helped with nearly 4,000 individual constituent concerns, including issues related to the Social Security Administration, Medicare, the IRS, the VA, the National Passport Center, and many other agencies. If you have encountered problems in your own dealings with the federal government, please [contact me](#) so that I can do everything possible to help.

Ending Warrantless Wiretapping

Earlier this month, the U.S. House passed an unwise bill to renew the FISA Amendments Act, which has for four years allowed the industrial-scale surveillance of Americans' private communications by the National Security Agency.

The measure would continue to allow the government to electronically collect and search the communications of Americans without a warrant. This "fishing expedition" approach to surveillance has not improved our security; it has only eviscerated our liberties.

Our surveillance laws should strictly adhere to a 4th Amendment standard: warrants should be issued only by a judge based on genuine probable cause. Our Founders understood that this is not simply a civil liberties nicety; it is a matter of better protecting the public by holding law enforcement to high standards. We ignore their wisdom at our peril.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt
Member of Congress